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Professional Self-Help Books: A Growing Genre
Independent Publishing: COSMEP at 20 Years • Letter from the Midwest
An Interview with Michael Holroyd • Index to Forecasts • SCBA Trade Show

Publishers Weekly

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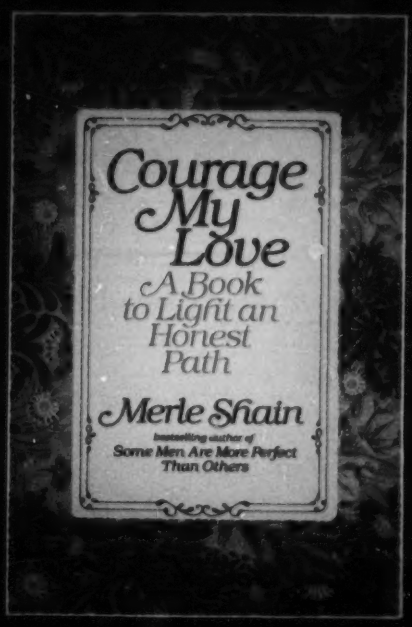

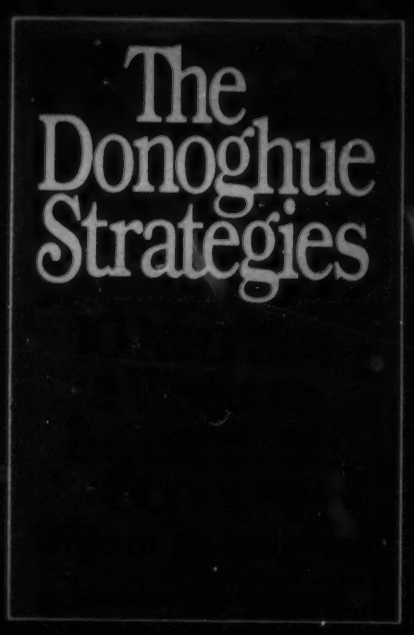

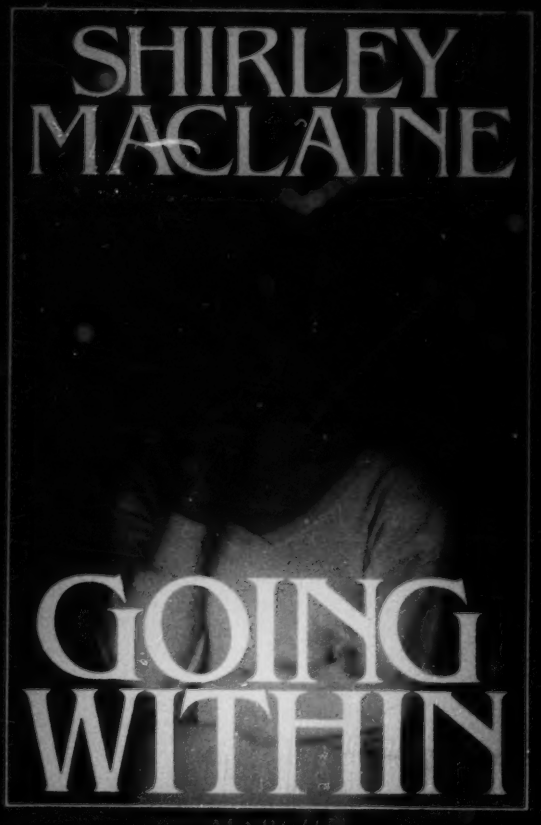

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THE GALLUP SURVEY

BY LEONARD WOOD

Self-Help Buying Trends

Nowadays, people in search of guidance aren't restricted to clergymen, doctors, or lawyers: they can simply read the advice column in the local newspaper or turn on the TV, where there is talk aplenty about people's problems. However, those who prefer not to open their personal lives to public inspection can always turn to their local bookstore as a source of problem-solving advice.

One-third of Americans (33%) have bought a self-help book. Women (36%) are more likely than men (30%) to have bought one, as are those age 35–49 (46%) when compared to older (24%) or younger (34%) people (Table 1).

Purchasing these books is also more common among those in the upper socioeconomic groups than among their counterparts.

Regionally, the percentage incidence of self-help-book buying is slightly higher in the East (35%) and West (38%) than in the Midwest (32%) and South (30%).

The largest proportion of consumers (24%) reported buying a book that discussed self-improvement, and the only other subject mentioned by more than one in ten purchasers was motivation (14%). Smaller shares of consumers bought advice on love and relationships (9%), stress and anxiety (8%), weight loss (7%), or health improvement (5%), while no more than one in twenty reported buying a book on any other self-help topic (Table 2).

Demographically, men are more inclined than women to buy books on self-improvement or motivation, but the opposite is true of books on stress or weight loss (Table 3).

Employed women were more likely than those not employed outside the home to buy self-improvement, motivation, or love/relationships books, but larger shares of unemployed than employed women bought weight-loss books. Surprisingly, women's employment status had no effect on their likelihood of purchasing books about stress.

Easterners were the most likely to buy self-improvement, love-relationships, or stress/anxiety books, but the least likely to purchase books on motivation.

So, these results suggest that the bookshelf may be providing some competition for Abby, Phil and Oprah, especially when women, middle-aged people, and those in the upper socioeconomic groups attempt to tackle a problem, for these are the groups most likely to help themselves to a self-help book.

NOTE: Results are based on 1,026 telephone interviews conducted among a nationally representative sample of adults, age 18 and older, during August 1988.

TABLE 1: Have you ever purchased a self-help book, that is, a book which describes how to solve a personal problem or improve yourself, or provides motivation or guidance? (%)

Total	33
Sex	
Male	30
Female	36
Age	
18–24 years	32
25–34 years	35
35–49 years	46
50 and older	24
Education	
College	46
High school graduate	29
Non-High school graduate	16
Annual Household Income	
$30,000 and over	46
$20,000–$29,999	31
$10,000–$19,999	25
Under $10,000	22
Women's Employment Status	
Employed	46
Not employed	24
Region	
East	35
Midwest	32
South	30
West	38

TABLE 2: Which of the following categories best describes the subject of the last self-help book you bought? (%)

Self-improvement	24
Motivation	14
Love and relationships	9
Stress and anxiety	8
Weight loss	7
Health improvement (volunteered)	5
Relaxation	4
Marriage and divorce	3
Business/Professional advice (volunteered)	3
Alcohol/Drug dependency	2
Aging	2
Death or mourning	2
Exercise (volunteered)	2
Nutrition (volunteered)	2
Financial success (volunteered)	2
Handling fears	1
Smoking	1
Intimacy and sex	1
Mood	1
Educational improvement (volunteered)	1
Parenting (volunteered)	1
Other	12

TABLE 3:

	Self Improvement	Motivation	Love & Relationships	Stress & Anxiety	Weight Loss
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	24	14	9	8	7
Sex					
Male	29	18	7	5	2
Female	20	10	11	10	10
Age					
18–34 years	22	14	14	9	7
35 and older	25	14	6	8	7
Education					
College	23	17	8	9	5
Non-college	24	9	10	7	10
Annual Household Income					
$30,000 and over	26	15	8	8	6
Under $30,000	24	11	8	8	8
Women's Employment Status					
Employed	22	12	13	10	7
Not employed	12	7	4	11	20
Region					
East	32	8	14	12	5
Midwest	22	13	7	7	8
South	18	18	10	7	11
West	22	16	5	7	4